

SERMON,

PREACH'D at the

Annual Visitation,

Held at *LISBURN*,

By the Right Reverend

FRANCIS,

Lord Bishop of *Down and Connor*,

On *Wednesday June 18, 1735.*

By *JOHN BRETT*, Vicar of *Milton* and
Singenton in the Diocese of *Connor*.

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To his GRACE the Most Reverend

F O H N,

Lord Archbishop of *Dublin*,
Primate of *Ireland*, and one of his
MAJESTY's most honourable *Privy-*
Council.

May it please your GRACE,

IT was not at all in my Intention,
when I preach'd the following Ser-
mon to have troubled your Grace,
or the World with any Brat of
mine ; but the different Centures passed upon
it, with some ill-natured Reflections upon my
self, have made it in some sort necessary to
send it abroad for my own Vindication ; and
tho' it is possible they may have been but pri-
vate and confin'd to a small Circle, yet as I
know they were made, and that it is hard to
tell in what manner they may affect me here-
after, I might be unjust to my self, if I passed
them over unregarded.

In general, my Lord, as it was the Work of Haste, upon short Warning, I am sensible it wants that Elegance and Correctness necessary to recommend it, at least to your Grace's nice and distinguishing Judgment; but according to a Saying common in the Mouth of a great and excellent * Man, "That it was a good Sermon that had no harm in it;" it may pass in the World; for I am humbly of Opinion, that it is perfectly harmless and innocent.

Considering the general Odium and Outcry so current and prevailing against the Clergy at present, I thought such a Discourse might not be improper nor unseasonable, wherein I endeavoured to apologize for my Brethren, and shew, how unjustly they were charg'd with giving Occasion for it: But the Difficulty was, to do this upon a proper Footing, for I plainly saw that in order to reconcile and make up Matters, with the Laity, it wou'd be necessary to throw off the Mantle of Zeal and Bigotry, and compliment them with a formal Surrender of many things, which tho' they have been loudly and warmly contended for, yet I look upon as mere Formalities gradually introduc'd into the Church by designing ambitious Men, for the Distinction and Support of Parties, and which never had any other Efficacy, nor can serve to any other End than to be Props to worldly Power.

This,

* Arch-Bishop Tillotson.

This, my Lord, I chose to do by representing my Brethren as already actually disclaiming those Corruptions, and disengag'd from all such Tenets as could give Offence to Men reasonably religious: But I find I was mistaken, and that the World is not yet come to that happy Temper that I fondly hoped they were in: My Brethren were (it seems many) offended, some said I was a Leveller, others, that I minc'd Matters and dealt unfairly to hint at Faults without pointing them out, and others that I had given up the express Institutions of our Lord: This last was a severe Reflection, and nothing cou'd affect me with greater Concern, were it true; but I am supported by my own firm Persuasion that it is not: The positive Institutions of Christianity are very few, and your Grace (I doubt not) will readily perceive, that throughout this whole Discourse, I have not given the least Glance directly nor indirectly to either of them.

Whatever Colour was given for any of these Objections, it might seem to be for the first, from a Passage mark'd * p. 30.

But, my Lord, I humbly apprehend, that he who only complains of an unjust or improper Regulation, ought not to be accused of an Intention to destroy Order, or to introduce an exact Parity: Wherefore let the Word, equal, there be understood in the Sense of just and proper, and the Objection will have no Weight nor Significancy at all.

I am

I am indeed sensible and confess (if that be a Fault) that I speak more for my Brethren, than they gave me Commission for, and find they are not all willing to join me in those Concessions, which I sincerely thought so much for their Credit and Advantage to make: But still, my Heart assures me, that if I have failed in representing them as they are, I have nevertheless represented them as they ought to be, and for the Truth of this make solemn Appeal to your Grace, and the sober unprejudic'd Reason of Mankind.

'Tis, my Lord, somewhat strange and unaccountable, that no sooner can a Man appear abroad in the Garb of Moderation, but he is suspected if not of Heresy, yet at least of some latent Disaffection to the Establishment, as if Orthodoxy and Moderation were incompatible in the same Person, and they only cou'd be Friends to the establish'd Church, who bore an avow'd irreconcilable Enmity to Dissenters of all Sorts; as indiscreet Patriots think they can never serve their Country but by thwarting and opposing every Measure of the Court; whereas did Men but think seriously, and judge impartially, they would find in the present Age many excellent Examples, wherein those valuable Qualities are happily united, and give Beauty and Ornament to one another.

Among these, it is your Grace's Glory and Credit to be highly conspicuous, neither a Traitor to the *just* Rights of that Church,
over

over which you preside, nor a rigid Oppressor of those, whose Misfortune it is from the Prejudices of a narrow and contracted Education, to be out of her Pale.

To your Grace therefore a Discourse, which breathes nothing but the mild and gentle Spirit of the Gospel, justly flies for Protection; a Spirit without which no Man can be orthodox, tho' he cou'd quote the Decrees of every Council, and the Writings of every Father, thro' a Series of sixteen Centuries to justify every Article of his Creed. And O! that this Reflection had but its just Weight, with all the Professors of Christianity; how influential would it be! in reconciling all the contending Parties among them, and composing all their Differences.

'Tis however one great Blessing that attends the present Age, that that Sourness and Rancour among divided Christians, which hath been so long the Bane of Society and the great Scandal of Christianity, is gradually decaying and dying away, and a Spirit of Charity and mutual Forbearance rising up and succeeding in its stead: And indeed, my Lord, when it exerts and displays itself with such Vigour in the Head, there is great Reason to hope, that it will in time spread and diffuse itself thro' all the Members; and that whatever may be the Case of common Professors, the Clergy at least may at length be happily incited to imitate those Virtues
which

which have rais'd and exalted your Grace's Character, even higher than your Station.

But I ought not to forget, that whilst I am commending this Principle in your Grace, I am making the most trying Experiment of it, by the Freedom, or rather Presumption, of this Address, for which I dare offer no Apology, for fear of aggravating my Fault, nor hope for Pardon, but under the Assurance that nothing harsh or severe can flow from a Mind fill'd with Impressions of Humanity and Benevolence, and habituated to Acts of Generosity and Condescension. In Confidence of which, I venture to subscribe,

May it please your GRACE,

Your GRACE'S

Most devoted,

Most dutiful

And obedient

Humble Servant,

John Brett.

ERRATA.

PAGE 2. Line 10. for *Affection* read *Affestation*. p. 14. l. 31. 2. Comma wanting at *Offence*, and dele Comma after *Cafe*. p. 17. l. 13. dele *and*. p. 22. l. 1. for *Ease* r. *Eff*. p. 24. the Quotation from Dr. South ends at *scourges*. p. 26. in the Note l. 8. for *sanctus* r. *sanctus*, and l. ult. for 11. r. 12. and for 6. r. 5.



A

SERMON, &c.

I Cor. 4. I.



*Let a Man so account of us as of the
Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of
the Mysteries of God.*

TIS evident from many Passages in the Writings of this Apostle, that he had high and exalted Notions of the Dignity of his own Calling ; that his Office was such as intitul'd him, and all others employ'd in it, to a more than ordinary Share of Honour and Regard ; that it was at least as honourable as any other subordinate Office or Employment, as they were the Delegates and Representatives of the greatest and most honourable Master, they cou'd be employ'd by ; and tho' from the Abundance of his Zeal

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for

for his Master's Honour and Service, he often takes upon him the humble Stile and Character of a Servant and a Minister, not disdaining to stoop to the meanest Office, by ministring to the Necessities of the meanest Person; yet least any should from hence take occasion to think slightly of his Office and Character, and consequently fail in their Respect to him, he therefore upon other occasions assumes a more honourable Title, and with some seeming Affection of Pomp calls himself Ambassador.

'Tis however no less evident from the Story of this Apostle's Life and Conduct, that he did not insist upon such Honour and Respect, merely upon his own account, for no one ever imitated his great Master more exactly in an exemplary Humility and winning Condescension; but rather to instruct the World, how to behave either to those his Copartners or Successors in the Ministry, who might not possibly have the same powerful Assistances of the Spirit of God, nor consequently such Lures of Honour and Admiration as he had: *Let a Man so account of us as of the Ministers of Christ, and, &c.* Not of me *Paul* only, but of all those who are now, or hereafter shall be employ'd in the same sacred Office and Ministry. The Challenge is authoritative and peremptory, and comes not in the Form of a Petition, nor claimed as a matter of Favour and Grace, but demanded as an Article of Duty.

But nevertheless the Apostles and first Ministers of the Gospel were seldom so forward in demanding Respect, as the People were in paying it, the Readiness of the one, generally preventing the Application of the other, and 'till the Fervor of true Christian Piety began to cool

cool and abate, hardly any Instances of Love and Regard were thought too great to be paid to those, who in so many ways were the Ministers of God to them for their Good ; a Priest and a Father were Characters of the same Import, and honour'd with the same Regard : But alas ! *Tempora Mutantur*, Reproach instead of Praise, Ignominy instead of Respect, Hatred instead of Love, are what their unhappy Successors too often meet with, whilst the small share of Honour and Regard that is paid to them, is meted out, not in proportion to the Dignity of their Office, and the real value of their Labours, but to the particular Rank and Quality they bear in the World : The Justness of which Censure is abundantly evident from this one Observation, that some of the most necessary and indispensable Offices of the Priesthood, *viz.* Admonition and Reproof, are such as cannot be executed, where the Circumstances of the Parties are not at least upon an Equality ; so that an Ambassador for Christ, is in many cases under the melancholy Necessity of being scorned and derided by every haughty proud Sinner, or of thwarting the Dictates of his Reason and Conscience, by leaving his Duty undone.

This Alteration in the Tempers and Behaviour of Men is too loudly complain'd of to need any proof ; and will appear so evident to any who will be at the Pains to cast even a transient Glance over the Accounts given of the primitive Times of Christianity, and compare them, with what passes in his own Days, that it would be trespassing upon the Patience of this Audience to endeavour it.

What I conceive will better reward our Time and Pains will be, 1st, to enquire into the Causes of it, and assign some determinate Reasons, that may at least with some degree of Probability (of Certainty I wou'd choose to say) account for the Change.

And 2^{dly}, when I have finish'd this Enquiry to lay before you what I humbly apprehend will most effectually contribute to stop this growing Evil, which (I believe) all who hear me have reason to know, is a real Impediment to the Business of our Calling.

First then, I am to enquire into the Causes, and assign the Reasons if I can, of this so visible Alteration in the Humours and Conduct of Men; in which Inquiry, I shall content myself with mentioning such as I am inclinable to think have most contributed towards it.

And 1st, This Age is more inquisitive, less credulous, and more learn'd and polite, than all or most that have gone before it.

Notwithstanding Christ hath expressly declar'd, that Men shall be rewarded or punish'd in the next Life, in proportion to the Talents they have receiv'd, the Means of improving them, and the Uses they have made of them, yet we do not find from the History of past Times, that Virtue and Knowledge, Learning and the Fear of God have thriven alike together; that the spiritual Powers of Men have receiv'd equal Improvements, with their natural Abilities; that Grace hath improv'd in their Hearts, as Learning did in their Minds; on the contrary, that the ways of Sinning have rather multiplied gradually in the World, and that the several Talents and Attainments, which shou'd have been converted to the Service and Glory of God,

God, (and which doubtless were given them for that Purpose) have been more frequently employ'd in the Service of Sin, in inventing new Arts of Luxury, in refining and polishing their Prodigality, so as to adorn Vice, and make it more amiable, that they might sin with greater Ease and Delight, have less Drudgery and more Complacence in the Act.

All the Time that can justly be brought into Account here, is what hath passed since the Reformation; all that proceeded since the first Usurpations of the Popes in the *West*, being generally and justly accounted Ages of Darkness, all the Learning in the World being then in the Hands of the Clergy, who were not so knowing either, nor wou'd have been reputed so, but for the Care they took to keep the rest of the World in Ignorance: Gross Ignorance and Idolatry had then overspread the Face of the *West*; and no wonder, when it was criminal to be knowing, and the Laity were not even permitted to read the Bible, *That Lamp of God*, so necessary for the Conduct of the moral World, that without its Light Man cou'd not find his Way, but must stumble and go astray every Step he takes.

In this dark and ignorant Age 'twas easy for the learned few, to impose upon the ignorant many; and Pride and Arrogance, Submission and Veneration, must have increas'd mutually and proportionably, to the real Ignorance of the one, and the fancied Perfections of the other: Ignorance being indeed that which at first gave Being to, and at present supports arbitrary and despotick Power throughout the World; all temporal and spiritual Tyranny,
owing

owing alike their Rise, Continuation, and Progress to it.

However, the World at length grown weary of this Tyranny, resolv'd to shake it off, and reinstate themselves in their lawful Liberty; which was no sooner effected, but Arts and Sciences began to flourish, every one was allow'd to make use of those Talents kind Providence had given him, many glorious and useful Discoveries were made, and as if the World had recovered from a second Deluge, a new Form and Face of Things quickly appeared.

But as there is seldom any Good in Life, without a Mixture of Evil, and by the Temerity and Depravity of Men, Things in their own Nature good, are made subservient to vile and base Purposes, so it happen'd in the Case before us; this Liberty soon became the Cloak of Maliciousness, neither the Love or Fear of God, nor a due Regard for Goodness and good Men, increas'd as it ought to have done: Men were neither more sober and temperate, more grave and devout, or more meek and tractable, than they were before, instead of this Variety of Heresies and Schisms, sprung up Mockers and Scoffers in Abundance; Men's Hands and Tongues were their own, and every one that was witty, being new-fangled in his Liberty dared to be prophane: So likewise were their Fortunes and Estates; they were no longer troubled with Taxes from *Rome*; and finding themselves in secure Possession, no Danger of an Inquisition, nor Indulgencies to pay for, they were fond of enjoying, gave a loose Rein to their Prodigality, and indulg'd without Restraint: Then they began to bear with a high Hand, to think greatly of their own Attainments,

ments, and set up wholly for themselves, to think they had no farther Need for Instructors, but cou'd learn and do their own Duty without teaching, and consequently cou'd not bear so tamely, with the Admonitions of their spiritual Guides; Jealousy and Distrust succeeded that Tameness and Submission, that they had been accustomed to before; they suspected that Men who held the same Office and Character wou'd always act the same Part; *wherefore they listned to none of their Council, nor wou'd none of their Reproof*, but repuls'd them at the first Onset, with vaunting, scoffing and mocking.

And thus, 'tis easy to picture the Libertines of those Times, and represent them as communing with themselves thus; “ Shall we who
 “ are just redeem'd from Bondage, we who are
 “ even now removed from Darkness into Light,
 “ and chang'd our Ignorance for Knowledge;
 “ shall we bend our Necks again to the Yoke,
 “ and bear the Insults of haughty Assumers,
 “ whose Province and Sport hath always been
 “ to tyrannize over their Fellow-creatures?
 “ No! we have more Wit than so, and the
 “ Examples of our suffering Fathers have
 “ taught us better Things. Away! then, ye
 “ Troublers of *Israel*, ye that turn the World
 “ upside-down, and learn Patience and Meek-
 “ ness, the proper Virtues of your Office, for
 “ we are resolv'd to stick fast by our Freedom,
 “ and to be no longer implicitly sway'd and
 “ govern'd by you.

Such Expostulations we may imagine, were then not uncommon, for to invert the Words of *Festus* to *Paul*, † *little Learning had made them*

them mad; the never failing Consequence of a superficial smattering in Sciences, but never of sound and well-digested Knowledge, as a noble Author observes, ‡ that a little Philosophy inclineth Mens Minds to Atheism, but Depth in it, brings them about to Religion.

2. Another Reason of this Alteration is, that the Prejudices contracted against the Clergy in Times of Popery, when they were guilty of many gross and scandalous Abuses, are not yet intirely obliterated, but the History of them is still preserv'd fresh in many Places, from whence Multitudes have conceiv'd a mighty Aversion to the whole Order.

There are, I believe, very few, who are not in some Measure sensible of this, there being scarce a single Family, in which there is not preserv'd some remarkable Story, either of the Avarice, the Pride, the Luxury or Lust of the *Romish* Clergy, and successively handed down from Father to Son, with all imaginable Care.

And indeed the Vices and Corruptions which reign'd among the Clergy for several Centuries before the Reformation, were too numerous, and too flagrant to be denied, or even readily forgot, such, as must have been Matter of Regret to all good Men, as must have disposed them sincerely to wish for, and heartily endeavour to bring about a Reformation; nay, must make us who live at this Day, pray for the Progress of it, in Pity to those poor deluded Souls, who are still in the Bonds of Ignorance, and from a Dread of the like Corruption and Depravation succeeding again, if ever God for the Punishment of our Sins, shou'd remove our Candle-

‡ Lord Bacon, *Essay* 16, of *Atheism*;

Candlestick, and suffer Popery again to prevail.

Now, altho' there are always some good Men, who from a real Knowledge of what is good, and a true Christian Zeal, will pay a due Respect to divine Truths, notwithstanding they be of corrupt and debauch'd Morals, who teach and deliver them. Yet these Things have a mighty Influence on the Minds of weak illiterate and unthinking Men; and even of those who are more knowing but for their Vices Sake are glad to skreen and shelter themselves under such Pretences.

I say then where the Memory of these Things is preserv'd, it is to no purpose to expect, that Men will either pay that Regard to their Persons, or Deference to their Injunctions, which on many Accounts is highly expedient, and which undoubtedly they wou'd have done, had they not been previously possess'd with such Prejudices.

However, seeing the Evil is now in a great Measure remov'd, and that our Pastors instead of being all proud, avaritious, or libidinous, are in the general, a Set of grave, sober, modest and devout Men, who both by their Doctrine and Example, show *that their Hearts Desire and Prayer for Israel is, that it may be sav'd.* 'Tis Time to quit and lay aside those Prejudices, which being now both groundless and unreasonable cannot be longer entertain'd, without Uncharity to them, and Prejudice to ourselves; at least to suspend them for awhile, 'till we see Reason again to reassume them, and join with these good Men in advancing the general Happiness of Mankind; the good Effect of which wou'd be, that it wou'd animate

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them

them with Courage in the Discharge of their Office; and the People on the other Hand, by observing their Industry and Care wou'd grow more diligent in their Duty and respectful to their Persons, and thus true Christian Virtue must of Necessity flourish by the concurring Endeavours of both.

3. Altho' the Persons now commission'd to instruct and reform the World, be Men of more unexceptionable Integrity, of more innocent, and unblameable Lives, than they who preceded the Reformation, yet they carry not about them such immediate convincing Proofs of their Authority and Mission, as the first Publishers of Christianity; consequently Men are struck with less Awe and Reverence for their Persons, and of Course for their Doctrine also.

The first Converts to Christianity had one Advantage towards believing, that we of the present Age are destitute of; that they were Eye-witnesses to the Miracles which Jesus wrought, as well as Hearers of his Word; so that their Hearts were not more won by the superlative Excellency of his Doctrine, than by the Surprisingness of his Works; not more affected with what they heard, than with what they saw: And he must have been wonderfully hardned by Prejudice, who cou'd have withstood the joint Force of Truth attended with Miracles.

We find in the Gospel that no sooner was the Comforter come, but the Apostles spake with Tongues, and prophesied; they did Wonders, healed the Sick, raised the Dead, &c. which Power we are assur'd continued among his Disciples, and was convey'd by the Imposition

sition of Hands, 'till Christianity had spread so far as no longer to need such Assistances.

These extraordinary Works were sufficient of themselves to convince the World, that they who wrought them, had the Power and Spirit of God, and were of mighty Influence in disposing Mens Minds to an easy Reception of the Truths they taught; at length they begat such an Awe and Reverence for the Persons who wrought them, that at once they became Masters of their Affections, ruled and govern'd them as they pleas'd; nay, we find that upon *Paul's* healing a Cripple at *Lystra*, the Priests and People immediately took him for a God, and wou'd have sacrific'd unto him, had he not run in in haste and preverted them.

Now, altho' there be at this Day sufficient Proofs to convince any reasonable Man, that the Priests and Ministers of the Establish'd Church are sent from God, and properly authorized and commission'd to preach his Word, yet seeing the Proofs are not so immediately present, nor so easily come at, but to be sought for in the Records of Antiquity, which requires not only a Capacity, but a previous Inclination to be convinc'd; and seeing that a great Part of the World are the Ignorant, and the Wicked; they who cannot and they who will not be convinc'd in this Way; seeing again that there are others who preach not the same Doctrine, and yet pretend to the same Authority; and that they are but few comparatively speaking, who have Capacity and Leisure to examine their several Claims and Pretences; and that neither Sides carry any thing extraordinary about them to make good their

Claims by: For these several Reasons I say, in the midst of so much Darkness and Uncertainty, it is not to be expected, that either that Respect for their Persons or Doctrine shou'd obtain so generally, nor they have such Weight and Influence as the first Preachers of the Gospel had.

But to proceed to a fourth, and that a very evident Cause of this Alteration, there is nothing to which I fear it be more justly imputed;

4. Than to the present Degeneracy of Manners, and the great Decay of Piety and Virtue among us.

This is certain in Fact, that the more Vices a Man is addicted to, the more Truths there are, which he cannot discern; for as there is no Vice, but what interferes with, or bears direct Opposition to some particular Truth, therefore whilst a Man is engag'd in the Service of any Lust, by an insatiating Power common to Vice in general, it so blinds his Understanding, as to render it incapable of discerning the opposite contradictory Truth: So if a Man be debauch'd in more Points than one, there are still more Truths which he cannot discern; and if he be a profess'd Libertine and Companion of Sin, 'tis odds but he is blind to all Truth in general.

And thus we can at last account, why more Impugners of divine Truth, have appear'd in one Age than in another; and why more in the present, than in most that are pass'd away; and why the Gospel of Jesus hath been attack'd with such Heat and Virulence, represented as a pious Fraud and political Contrivance, and the Publishers of it as Cheats and Impostors.

Is it not, because Vice is now triumphant in Power, and bears a general Sway; and that of all the religious Schemes that were ever concerted, there never was one which bore so hard upon the Customs of deprav'd Men, that was so directly opposite to the general Inclinations of the World, or so justly calculated for the Extirpation of Vice, and the Propagation of Piety and Virtue?

Under all other instituted Forms of Religion, a Man might be as wicked as he pleas'd for a while, and a Sacrifice, a Priest, or a Pilgrimage cou'd rub out the Score, and set all to Rights again.

But here nothing can expiate but sincere and actual Amendment, and shaking Hands both with the Vice itself, and all the Gains and Wages of it.

Again; Hence also we can account why that particular Precept, † *Remember them which have the Rule over you*, hath been so lightly regarded; and why the Persons there meant, are so frequently the Subjects of Scorn and Derision; why the Men, I say, who in the first and purest Times of Christianity, were valued and respected by all Men; and for their abundant Labours, were reputed the universal Well-wishers of Mankind; why, I say, the Men who bear the same Office and Character at this Day, shou'd now be look'd upon as Cheats, who have no other main End in view, than to promote their own Interest, as Usurpers upon the Liberties of Mankind, and who support themselves in Ease and Luxury, by preying upon the Vitals of their Fellow-creatures.

Why!

Why! Because they are now more in love with their Vices, and these are the Men that bear Testimony against them; who upbraid them with their offending the Law, and object to their Infamy the Transgressions of their Education. ‡ Therefore, say the Wicked, "Let us lie in wait for them, seeing they are not for our Turn, they are clean contrary to our Doings, and were made to reprove our Thoughts; let us therefore examine them with Despiteness and Torture, that we may know their Meekness and prove their Patience; let us condemn them with shameful Death, for by their own Saying they will be respected."

Here however I shou'd be unwilling to be misunderstood; for I do not say, that upon every Instance of Clamour and Out-cry rais'd against the Clergy, we are immediately to conclude, that there is a general Corruption of Manners among the Laity, which wou'd be rash and unrighteous Judgment; there being frequently too much Ground from the Conduct of particular Men among them for such Clamour: But this I say, that wherever Offence is taken without just Grounds, and a Charge that ought to be confin'd to Particulars is levelled at the whole Order; whenever the Clamour becomes universal without Distinction; the Conclusion is warrantable and well grounded; it is not the Man but the Office that gives the Offence in this Case, they are esteem'd and treated as Enemies, only because they tell Men the Truth: For this the holy Jesus was mock'd and set at nought by *Herod* and his Men at War: For this *John the Baptist* was imprison'd

imprison'd by him; for this most of the pious and zealous Advocates of Religion, have in all Ages been either cruelly persecuted, or scornfully and reproachfully dealt with, of which it wou'd be endless to enumerate Instances.

And so much for the Causes of this Alteration, whereof, tho' several others might be assign'd, yet having instanc'd in those that have been chiefly accessory to it, I shall think myself now at Liberty to descend to the second Thing propos'd; which was,

2. To lay before you what I humbly apprehend will be the best Remedy for this Evil, which portends such vast Damage to the general Cause of Piety, and the Good of Mens Souls.

And if in what hath been said, I have been so happy as to discover the real Causes of it, 'twill be no very difficult Matter to prescribe a proper and effectual Remedy; for as in natural Physick, so in spiritual, the Symptoms of the Disease being the Doctor's only Guide in his Prescriptions, which if they be apparent and certain, and to be depended upon, he must be mighty ignorant, or unexperienc'd in his Profession, who cannot order a proper Recipe for it, such as by a due Regimen and Administration shall effectually cure the Patient, and recover his Constitution.

From an impartial Survey then of the Nature of this Evil, and a just Consideration of those Causes of it, which are here specified, It will appear, that these two Things, viz.

Faithfulness in the Priest, and Sincerity in the People,

will effectually put a Stop to it, and hinder its malign Influences from spreading farther among us: So that to invert the Words of the Prophet; * *If the Health of the Daughter of my People is not recovered, 'tis not because there is no Balm in Gilead, or no Physician there.*

As to the First, by which I mean a faithful and diligent Execution of the several important Offices of our Calling; I can't imagine there is any Occasion for shewing the Usefulness or Expediency of it, to the Attainment of the End propos'd; for tho' we are very apt to complain of the Degeneracy of Manners, and the Corruptness of Times, (and often with great Reason) yet the World was hardly ever so corrupt and wicked yet, but that a religious and good Man has been for the most Part lov'd and honoured.

Let us but once convince the World, that we have the Glory of God and the Good of Mens Souls in Earnest at Heart; that it is his Honour, and not our own, that we seek; that we are ready to do good Offices to all, and averse from doing the least Injury or Mischief to any; that we bear no Hatred or Enmity to the Persons, but only to the Vices of Men; that we are candid in our Censures and discreet in our Reproofs, without any Mixture of Vain-glory and Affectation, and all Men will rise up, and call us blessed; bad Men will be ashamed to be our Enemies, and conceal their Aversion, or if they shou'd let fly their Arrows at us, even bitter Words, they will hurt us not; but good Men will be sure to be our Friends. 'Tis so in general; and 'twou'd be hard to suppose it shou'd not be so of us too of whom it is written, *How beautiful are the Feet of them that preach the Gospel of Peace, and bring glad Tidings*

things of good Things. But to use a homely and trite Expression, if Men will put on Bears Skins, the Dogs will bark; if instead of preaching the Gospel of Peace, they are continually sowing the Seeds of Strife and Sedition; and instead of bringing glad Tidings, are daily denouncing Woes, and upon every slight and frivolous Pretence damning and excommunicating their Brethren and Fellow-creatures. If they who are ordain'd to be Ministers and Servants will affect to be Masters, and assume Powers and Titles that no way belong to them, 'tis vain to think of stopping Men's Mouths and from crying out, *ye take too much upon you!* or to expect to be treated like the Disciples of Jesus, when their Conduct plainly show they are none of his.

St. Paul, who challenges a more than ordinary Share of Reverence and Regard for the Ministers of Christ, on account of their Office and Works, yet makes the faithful Discharge of that Office, the indispensable Condition of obtaining it; Moreover (in the Verse following the Text) it is required in Stewards that they be found faithful; by which he plainly argues, that being called or ordain'd to that sacred Office of itself, doth not intitle Men to that Degree of Respect, which he demands; unless we walk worthy of that Vocation: After the same manner he argues also in his Epistle to the *Hebrews*, *Obeys them that have the Rule over you, for they watch for your Souls, as they that must give an Account*; where Submission and Respect are again required, but still upon the Terms of our Faithfulness and Diligence: And, as † Bishop Burnet observes upon this Text, “ They who do not watch like Men that must
D “ give

† *Past. Care, c. 3. p. 47.*



“ give an Account of their Trust, have no reason to expect these from the People.

Let me not however be misunderstood. My Design is not to bring any railing Accusation against the Clergy; for as I observ'd before, so I am bold to repeat, That there is but little either of that Sloth or Immorality, which in certain Ages abounded greatly, to be laid to their Charge: All that I aim at by these Hints is only to show, that the Honour is not inseparable from the Office, but connected with the Duty, thereby to invigorate our Diligence, and awaken our Zeal, to push on to new Measures of Perfection, 'till we arrive unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ, that like those Elders who labour in the Word and Doctrine, and rule well, we may be counted worthy of double Honour.

And the more we reflect upon the present State of Religion among us at this Day, the easier we shall be convinc'd that this is both a useful and important Lesson, and what ought to affect us with all imaginable Seriousness and Attention.

When we consider, that in these Days are come Scoffers, walking after their own Lusts, Men of swelling Imaginations, and insolent Understandings, who turn every thing that is sacred into Ridicule, and treat the Scriptures of God with the same ludicrous Freedom, that they wou'd the fabulous Writings of a Heathen Poet.

That the chief Articles of our Religion have been impugn'd, the Divinity of its Author flatly denied, his Miracles derided, as the faint Arts of Magick, and the Illusions of Juggle, and his Person vilified and traduc'd with the infamous Names of Impostor and Cheat.

That the Impossibility of his Incarnation, and the Absurdity of his Resurrection, are become the
common

common Topicks of Raillery with these profane licentious Men.

That the whole History of our Redemption hath been represented as a pious Farce, and the political Contrivance of designing Men, and that all the Pretensions of Christianity have been rejected, upon this bare Surmise, that there was no Occasion or Necessity for such a Revelation, because all, or at least the best of its Doctrines were known before, or are now actually discoverable by the bare Light of natural Reason.

If we consider farther with what Stratagem and Art, this deadly Poison is prepared, and what specious Pretexts have been invented to make it pass with Smoothness and Currency.

That the Men who propose it are bold in declaring, that they have no other Design than to pluck out the Beam that is in Men's Eyes, that they may see clearly, that it is with a charitable Intent to recover the Privileges of Reason, and to rescue their Fellow-creatures from a long usurp'd Slavery, and the tyrannous Impositions of a hireling Priesthood; that the Opinions themselves are such as Freedom of Thought, Liberty of Judgment, and an impartial Inquiry into Truth lead Men unavoidably into.

That (which is yet worse) those bold Dictators have manag'd these Pretences, with such Subtlety and Skill, as to have gained a mighty Reputation for Learning, Penetration and Probity; and have drawn after them vast Numbers of Proselytes, who giddily swallow all that is said to them with as much implicit Blindness, as ever a Mob did the Prescriptions of a Mountebank-Doctor; that in the Follies and Weaknesses of disagreeing Sects among Christians lies all their Strength, and that the immoral Lives of Clergy-

men, which they never fail to impute to the Score of our Religion, of all other Things give them the greatest Advantage against us.

When I say we consider all this, it cannot surely but enliven our Zeal, and add new Force to our Endeavours, to have our *Loyns girded, our Lamps trimmed, and our Lights always burning*; that when these cunning Enemies of Souls come, they may find us ready and prepared, watching over our respective Flocks, and so have no Opportunity of sowing their wicked Tares; to give Attendance to Reading, and Exhortation, and Doctrine; to meditate upon them continually, to give ourselves wholly to them, that we may save both our selves, and them that hear.

This would effectually silence all the impertinent Cavils of sophistical Unbelievers, and wou'd indeed raise the Honour and Credit of our Profession more than all the Noise and Boast, and Faction that we can make: Nay, it wou'd confound all the Pretences, and destroy all the Fortresses of Infidelity, and leave it bare and naked, exposed in its native Deformity, without any Armour of Defence, but the pertinacious Pride of wicked Men.

It is observed in the Gospel, that it was whilst Men slept, that *the Enemy came and sow'd Tares*; and St. James assures us, † that if we resist the Devil, he will fly from us. And it hath been observ'd by a ‡ late Author, who cannot be suspected of any great Friendship or Partiality to our Establishment, that “ if the Bishops and inferior Clergy
 “ did but reside constantly, and do their Duty
 “ with Exactness and Care, they need not fear
 “ what either the *Tolands*, the *Tindals*, the *Collins's*
 “ or *Woolstons* of the Age might say or write against their Religion, for that it wou'd then
 “ shine

† Chap. 4. v. 7.

‡ Whiston's Memoirs of Dr. Clarke.

“ shine bright even in the Eyes of these Men, to
 “ their Conviction and Reformation.

Seeing then, my Brethren, we have this Hope, let us purify our selves, let us watch in all things, do the Work of Evangelists, and make full Proof of our Ministry, giving no Offence in any thing, that it be not blamed, always bearing in Mind, that tho' *it is impossible but that Offences will come*, yet Woe is pronounc'd against that Man *by whom the Offence cometh*.

Here therefore I shall take the Liberty under this Head to give a Caution against two Particulars, whereby we seem to be in most Danger of giving Offence, and whereat others at this Day seem most ready and inclinable to take it :

And these are, *Bigotry* and *Passion*.

Bigotry in certain Tenets of small and comparatively trifling Importance, and Passion in our Disputes with those that oppose us.

What these Points are which I here call of trifling Import, I have not Time at present to repeat ; every one who understands the Nature and Ground of that Religion he professes, will readily perceive what they are ; the most essential necessary Articles, that which is the Life and Spirit of all Religion, is what we ought to give most Heed to ; and yet who is there so ignorant, who knows not, that many Things are strongly abetted, and urged with an Excess of Heat and intemperate Zeal, that are no more than the Shadows and Forms of it ; and which are so far from being really necessary, that Religion, that which is pure and undefiled before God, might very well subsist without them.

Religion is capable of being adorn'd, and receiving much Lustre, from many adventitious Circumstances, which yet are no way essential

to the Ease or Support of it; and these Ornaments may be used and defended, provided it be not at the Expence of somewhat more necessary, and material, as every Christian must acknowledge, Unity and Charity really are; and there is no one who has a just Sense of these Obligations, but wou'd recede a little, even in Points, which by some People are held in such great Request, as to pass for Tests, and Criterions of Orthodoxy: 'Tis possible that if the Terms of our Communion were a little brought down, we might by it reap a great and a glorious Harvest, and thinking Men will be easily convinc'd that this might be done without any real Disparagement, or Disadvantage, either to the Christian Religion in general, or our own Establishment in particular.

This must be affirm'd as certain, that the present Exigencies require some softning Emulcients of this Nature; and if any of those Prodigals, who have so long wandered, are willing to return, we ought to extend our Arms *wide*, to embrace and receive them.

Such Hints are not improper from this Place, but I shall pursue them no further, for fear of entering upon a Province that may be thought no way belongs to me. I pass on therefore to the second general Caution given, which is,

2. That we endeavour as much as in us lies, to avoid all inordinate Passion with those who oppose us.

We are commanded in meekness to instruct those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure shall give them Repentance to the Acknowledgment of the Truth; and the servant of the Lord must be gentle to all Men, apt to teach, patient; which shows that altho' Zeal for Religion be indeed a commendable Quality, yet it must be according

according to Knowledge, temper'd with Candor and Moderation, and that tho' we must contend earnestly for the Faith, yet it must be only for that Faith that was once delivered unto the Saints, and still with a calm and rational Composedness of Temper.

The World is come to that Pass, that Noise and Passion cannot be obtruded upon them for Reason and Argument, and Errors in Opinion are of such a Nature, as not to be cured in that Way. True Religion never yet fared the better for the intemperate Zeal of its Professors; they are unequally yoked; the one hath no more Concord with the other, than CHRIST has with *Belial*; the greatest Ornaments, and strongest Recommendations we can give it, are Meekness and Moderation.

'Tis possible that in some Cases we may be angry and not sin; we may meet with many reasonable Provocations, and Resentment is as much an Affection of human Nature as Benevolence. But a Man's objecting to our Principles, and inquiring a Reason of the Hope that is in us, is none of these; such Persons are Objects of another Affection; our Pity and Compassion are never more laudably exercis'd, than when we are endeavouring to convince them of their Errors, and lead them into the Ways of Righteousness and Truth; the Lame and the Blind do not better deserve it; Instruction is as much due to the other, as an Alms to these; and we might as reasonably quarrel with the one as with the other for asking it.

'Tis needless to multiply Arguments upon this Head; the Event always evinces the Folly of the least Degree of Passion upon such Occasions; for tho' it be not always as it is usually understood a sure Sign of a bad Cause, yet it is a never-failing Indication of the Weakness and Ignorance of him
who

who defends it; it gives certain Victory to the Opposer, and brings sure Contempt on one's self.

Neither is this the worst of it; it doth Mischief to Truth in general, by giving false Notions and Misapprehensions of our Religion, upon which Account St. *Paul* admonisheth us in the Person of *Titus*, * *to use sound Speech which cannot be condemn'd, that he that is of the contrary Part may be asham'd, having no evil thing to say of us.*

But that which still more reflects upon Religion, and is the greatest Scandal that can be given is, when Men carry their Zeal and Passion to such Excess as to become a Principle of Persecution in them; when it proceeds to such a Degree, it is a Reproach to human Nature as well as the Christian Religion, and no wonder then that the Generality of the World are offended at those who show themselves possess'd of it in any Degree; it is what no Intent can justify, no End or Design that we may have can possibly make it lawful; it is not only contrary to the Precepts, but likewise to the very End and Design of all Religion, that a Man shou'd be forc'd to perform any one religious Act, before he is convinc'd that it is his Duty to do it: “ If Errors in Opinion (as a † witty Author observes of Sin) lay but Skin deep, 'tis possible it might be whipt out with Rods and Scourges, but they lie too deep in the Understanding to be come at this way, and therefore not to be attempted but by laying before Men the impartial Evidences of Truth, and gently endeavouring to remove those Prejudices, which Vice, temporal Interest, Ignorance, or a bad Education have thrown in its Way.

Would we make such Profelytes as may be of real Credit and Advantage to us? These and these only

* *Tit.* 2. 8.

† *Dr. South.*

only are the Methods by which they must be won, and not by any outward Compulsion or coercive Restraints, which may possibly make some Hypocrites, but never any sincere Converts.

In the Gospel, the Gentiles who were brought in from the High-ways and Hedges are indeed said to be compelled to come in, but how? truly as as Dr. *Stanhope* rightly paraphrases upon this Text, “ * Not from any external irresistible Necessity made use of to reduce them, but by the Evidence of Miracles, by the powerful Convictions of Truth, by the Strength of Arguments, by repeated Messages, and all the prevailing Arts of a holy Importunity; so that this Expression of compelling signifies only an exceeding Care and sollicitous Application to win them over, and the marvellous Efficacy of those Methods at last.

And in truth every other Interpretation of these Words, even that which wou’d infer the so much admired Doctrine of *wholesome Severities*, is so opposite to the whole Tenor of the Gospel, to the intire Example of our Saviour, and all the Methods made use of by him in the Conversion of Infidels and Sinners; so repugnant to unprejudic’d Reason, and so destructive of the Rights of Mankind, that if all the Fathers of the Church had with one Voice given into them, I cou’d never be persuaded to submit to their Authority.

But indeed this is an Absurdity they are happily free of, and not to be found in the Writings of the antient Fathers. No, says † *Chrysostom*, “ He that errs from the Faith should neither be drag’d by Force, nor compelled by Fear.”

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And

* See his Sermon on Luke 14. 23, 24.

† ὁ ἐκ τῆς πίστεως ἀπολλύμενος, οὐδὲ ἀναγκάσειται. *Chrys.*

De Sacerdotio, Lib. 11.

And * *Austin*, once so besotted in the contrary Opinion, and at this Day falsely alledg'd as the Ringleader and Patron of it, yet had the Courage and Honesty at last to retract and recant it.

Such Interpretations of Scripture, or the Principles for Defence of which they are calculated, being never abetted by any Christian Divines, until innumerable other Corruptions began to creep and spread thro' both the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church, and it was necessary to erect a spiritual Tyranny, in order to gain them an easy Reception; and therefore should be carefully exploded by all those who are the Ministers of Religion, and under the strongest Ties of Duty, of being Examples of Charity and Moderation and Meekness to others; of being blameless and harmless the Sons of God, without Rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation, among whom we ought to shine as Lights in the World.

And now, my Brethren of the Laity, what shall we say, to reconcile our selves to you, and gain from you those Instances of Love and Regard

* It may not be amiss to justify that Father from the Imputation of so abominable a Heresy, to give the Reader here a remarkable Passage in his Works, that shows him to have been intirely free from it: " Illi in vos sevant, qui nesciunt quo cum Labore verum inveniatur, et quam difficile evadantur Erroris: Illi in vos sevant, qui nesciunt quam raram et arduam sit, Carnalia Phantasmata, Pia Mentis serenitate superare: Illi in vos sevant, qui nesciunt quanta difficultate sanctus Oculis Interioris Hominis ut possit inveniri solus sumus: Illi in vos sevant qui nesciunt quanta Gemitibus et Sussurris fiat, ut ex quantalacunque parte possit intelligi Deus: Porro illi in vos sevant, qui nullo tali Errori decepti sunt quasi vos deceptos vident: Ego autem in vos seviré omnino non possum quos sicut me ipsum illo tempore, ita nunc debeo sustinere, et tanta Patientia vobiscum agere, quanta mecum agerem. Proximi mei, cum in vestro Dogmate Rabiosus et Cacus Brarem." As quoted by Gros. de Jur. Bel. ac Pac. Lib. II. Cap. xx. 6. L.

gard that are necessary to support us in the Discharge of the several important Offices of our Calling? I know of nothing that can effectually do it but Sincerity, which in every thing that affects or concerns Religion, *is the one thing needful*; without which *nothing is strong, nothing is holy*.

But e're we are too urgent with you upon this Score, it may not be amiss to expostulate with you the Reasonableness of our Demand; and if ye would but bear with me a little, I would ask, what there is, either in our Persons, Characters, or Conduct, that should provoke you to Jealousy or Ill-will? The trifling Distinctions of a Garb, or a Title surely can give no Offence; and are we not all the Ministers of that same Christ, whom ye acknowledge to be, as indeed he is, your Lord and only Saviour?

Do we not all preach the same Gospel of Faith, Righteousness, and Repentance, which he left us in Charge, and beseech you in his Name to be reconciled to God?

Have we not faithfully handed down to you the Word of that same God; or do we any where instead of it, preach up to you the Traditions of Men?

Do we lay upon you any grievous or heavy Burdens, in which we are not content and willing to bear our Share, or refuse to put forward our Fingers to help and ease them?

Are there any Offices of Love and Friendship, any thing wherein we might profit your Souls or your Bodies, any thing wherein we might even please you, without injuring our own Consciences, which we would not chearfully undertake and accomplish, as far as our Powers and Capacities will enable us?

Do we usurp, or even claim any Power or Authority over you, but what Christ hath in plain and express Terms committed and delegated to us, of watching over you for your Good, of instructing, exhorting, warning, and reproving you, of preaching and explaining the Word of God, and committing it again to faithful Men, who shall be able to teach others also?

We require no blind and implicit Submission to our Dictates and Decisions, no Right of determining dogmatically in Controversies of Faith, no Power of adding to, or taking from the Word of God, on Pretence of explaining it, nor any Jurisdiction over the Hearts and Consciences of Men.

Knowing the Terrors of the Lord we do indeed persuade Men, declare the Curses of God to be due to such Acts of Disobedience as he himself hath pointed out, and again to the Humble and Contrite we pronounce the comfortable Assurances of Pardon and Forgiveness; but a *Power of the Keys*, of damning and saving Men at Pleasure, and sealing their Election or Reprobation, this, and such like *Idola Tribus*, we utterly renounce. No! we are better acquainted with our Charge than so; we look upon our selves, not only as Ministers of the Christian Church at large, but likewise of a Protestant and reformed Church in particular, in whom such Pretences would be most ungraceful and unbecoming.

As such therefore we advise Men to be godly and religious, but to be so upon Principle and Conviction; and therefore in every Case of Intricacy and Doubt, to make use of their own Reason and their own Understanding, and
instead

instead of endeavouring to put out Men's Eyes, we advise them to look sharply, and to examine with Caution freely, but sincerely.

We assert no Independency of the Church on the State, nor claim any Privileges or Exemptions but such as are our natural and unalienable Rights, as we are free-born Men and good Subjects; even our Support and Maintenance, we do in all humble Gratitude acknowledge to be the Bounty of the State; we set up no antienter Title, nor pretend to derive them from any higher or greater Authority.

We do indeed say, that it is the Voice of God in the Scriptures written by his Inspiration, and of common Nature in the Reason of Man, *That if we administer to you in spiritual Things, we ought to partake of your Temporals, that he that serves at the Altar should live by the Altar, and the Labourer is worthy of his Hire.*

But still we allow that those restraining Acts, whereby the Jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical Court is cramp'd in extending its Prerogative, and precluded from enlarging its Revenues beyond what is reasonable, were proper and necessary Checks upon the exorbitant Demands of avaricious Worldlings; wherefore we are content to submit our Demands to the Judgment of the State, and to have the Equity of them tried by a Jury of Laymen.

But ye will perhaps say, *That we are become fat with the chief Offerings of the People;* and think we have too great a Share of these: If so, here I am persuaded ye over-reckon; for, were there an equal and proper Distribution of the Church's Revenues, 'twould not be found that the Clergy had more than a reasonable

able Competency to support themselves in Decency with Frugality, with some small Overballance for Charity and Hospitality; Virtues, wherein we may say without Vain-glory or Boasting, we are as ready and exemplary as any Order of Men in the Land: Your poor Tenants are many of them fed and supported by our Bounty; and in Seasons of extraordinary Scarcity (besides our daily Charity) receive, as I can witness from many Examples, large Abatements and Remittances of our legal Properties, when their Mouths are full of Complaints against the Oppression of Landlords.

Here and there indeed one rolls in Plenty and Ease, and this draws Envy, another is pinch'd and straightned, and this draws Contempt; in some Places you see an over-grown Sine-cure, and in others a Number of poor Vicaridges; but doth this prove that the Revenue is too great? No; only that the Distribution is unequal; but who I beseech you shou'd bear the Blame of that? ye have the Power of altering and modelling it, why then do ye not make it equal?

And now, my Brethren, after so fair, so candid an Expostulation, after so full and impartial a Justification of ourselves; why such Jealousy? why so much Hatred and Ill-will, as we daily meet with? why are your Mouths full of Invectives and bitter Complaints, and the very Name of the Clergy so hated, as if the whole Tribe were the most impious Scoundrels, sworn and link'd in a Confederacy, to put out your Eyes, and rob you of all your Properties?

If here and there there be a rotten Member among us, instead of excusing, or endeavouring to

to skreen and shelter him in his Vices, in the Language of the Apostle, we wish to God *they were cut off from the Body, who thus trouble you*; and as ye have a Law, take ye him and judge him according to it.

'Tis not to be expected that we should be all of us equally enlightned, and equally holy; it must be an extraordinary Society indeed, in which there are not both good and bad; but if the Former be the major Part, the Denomination shou'd be taken from thence; nor should a few excentrick wandring Stars turn the Ballance against a whole Constellation of regular and well-disposed Men.

By this Method of judging, which would be thought reasonable in any other Instance, we are content to abide, and stand or fall.

And can ye then pretend to say that ye may not edify under such a Ministry as the present? or will ye say, that ye are sincere in the Religion ye profess, if ye do not? I will bring no railing Accusation, for my Design is not to condemn you, but to justify our selves. Only let me prevail with you for this most reasonable Request, that ye will give us and your own Souls the Benefit of a second Thought: Endeavour to do your Christian Duty sincerely, and I shan't fear but ye will soon come to a better Temper, and entertain more favourable Thoughts of us. Sincerity will wipe off the black and foul Disguise, will add an Embellishment to our Virtues, and cast a Shade over those Infirmities, that in spite of all we can do, are the unavoidable Companions of our Mortality; the only things for which we beg a charitable Connivance.

Let

Let therefore as many as would be perfect be thus minded, and if in any thing ye be otherwise, may God out of the Abundance of his Mercy reveal it unto you.

To whom be Glory and Thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

F I N I S.



